

health care debate that is ensuing. He will do that, and then over the coming weeks and months, we will contemplate and think about what he said.

It is not insignificant that President Obama will be speaking to such a gathering. We will come together in a joint session because we share a joint future and a joint destiny. We are all in this together—Republicans, Democrats, and Independents, every American citizen and each of their representatives here, Members of Congress, Senators, and the President of the United States.

Senator TED KENNEDY said last December, just months ago:

We know the future will outlast all of us, but I believe that all of us will live on in the future we make.

This is a historic moment. This is our time to shape our future. We stand closer to real health insurance reform than ever before. We are closer than ever to getting this right. We will not give up. We will not bet on failure. We will not let fear obscure the facts. We will not let the priorities of the partisan overpower those of the people.

We have goal lines ahead of us. I say to the Presiding Officer, a member of the Finance Committee, we have to do everything we can to join together to do health care reform that is meaningful to this country. I think I speak for everyone in Nevada and I think I speak for everyone on this side of the aisle and I am confident my friend, the distinguished Republican leader, agrees with me.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

SENATOR TED KENNEDY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the Senate grieves the loss of one of its giants and one of our great friends. All of us were, of course, moved by the many tributes that have poured in since Senator KENNEDY's passing. We will make time later in the week for Senators, including myself, to deliver tributes of our own on the Senate floor.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I previously had an opportunity to welcome my friend, the majority leader, back and welcome all our other colleagues from an active month in August. I know we always enjoy spending this time with our constituents and hearing their particular concerns. This year, most of us got an earful, and I hope the experience has an effect on our work as we move forward.

Health care reform is clearly a critical issue for many Americans, and I think we have an obligation to show them we have been listening closely to their concerns.

At this point, there should be no doubt about where the American people stand: The status quo is not acceptable but neither are any of the proposals we have seen from the White House or the Democrats in Congress so far.

The White House has attempted to retool its message on health care many times. It should be clear by now that the problem is not the sales pitch. The problem is what they are selling.

Over the past several weeks, I have visited with a lot of doctors, nurses, seniors, hospital workers, small business men and women and a whole lot of other citizens across Kentucky and, for that matter, throughout the country. None of them would call our current health care system perfect. But all of them are worried about so-called reforms that would undermine the things they like about the American health care system.

The American people are asking us to start over. They want reforms, but they want the right reforms, not some grand scheme that increases the national debt, expands the Federal Government, raises taxes, cuts seniors' benefits, and forces Americans off the plans they currently have and like. They want reforms that work within the system we have.

We have a lot of work to do in the weeks ahead, but these past few weeks have given us all something valuable. They have given us real clarity about the direction Americans want us to take and, as importantly, the direction they do not want us to take. Now it is our turn to show them we have been listening and to act.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, I believe I have 15 minutes, and I would ask the Chair to let me know when 2 minutes remains.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Chair will do so.

LISTENING TO THE PRESIDENT

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, we have two speeches by the President of the United States today and tomorrow. The speech today is to the schoolchildren of America, and the one tomorrow night is to us—to a joint session of Congress and to the country.

For the last several days, there has been a small uproar about the President's speech to schoolchildren. In some ways, that is very understandable. The country is very wary right now of more Washington takeovers. We have seen takeovers of banks and in-

surance companies and car companies and student loans and even farm ponds and health care, and all of a sudden some people may have thought the President was intending to take over the classrooms of America as well. That was compounded by the fact that the early lesson plans—probably drawn up by someone either in the White House or the Department of Education—made the speech seem more about the President than about the children and inviting the children to help the President fulfill his goal of the way he wants to transform America.

Well, all that has been changed. The lesson plan has been altered. The President has released a copy of his speech. I read it this morning in Tennessee on my way coming up. It is a good speech. It is about the importance of studying and education. It is about how the President grew up, which is an inspiring story, as is the case with almost all of our Presidents.

So I am glad the President has spoken to the schoolchildren of this country. Of course, the President of the United States ought to be able to speak to the schoolchildren of America. President Reagan did it. Not long after he was elected, he talked about how our country was founded. When I was Education Secretary in 1991, the first President Bush did it. He talked primarily about drugs, with a warning about the dangers of drug use. Presidents should speak to our students, but, of course, parents and teachers should decide whether the children hear the speech and in what context they hear it.

Tomorrow night, when the President addresses the country, no one has to listen to him, except those of us, perhaps, who volunteered to serve in the Congress. We will be here. Millions will listen out of respect to the office, but some could turn off their televisions, some could just read about it, some could listen to the commentators talk about it, and some could watch it on the Web. Children have a different situation. They are captive in their classrooms and they are inexperienced, so we rely on parents and teachers to use their good judgment to decide whether any speech is appropriate for children to hear and in what context.

If I were a teacher, I would jump at the chance to take advantage of this speech. I believe I would put up a picture of Reagan and one of FDR and one of Abraham Lincoln, and I would talk about the Presidency and I would talk about how he is the agenda setter and how the President's election—this President and other Presidents—represents the unique American characteristic that anything is possible for any American of any background. I would point out that there is a Congress as well and the Congress often disagrees with the President. And then I would put up a picture of the leader of North Korea, and I would say: There is the dear leader of North Korea. If you criticize him, you go to jail. If you